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POL-23-8-Sao Paulo
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INFO: AMERICAN Department of State
EMBASSY
BRASILIA BRAZIL
Ambassies Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro, Amcons Belem,
Porto Alegre, Salvador and Recife.

Amconsul SAC PAULO

August 3, 1970

Incarcerated Dominican Priest; a Report from Tiradentes
Prison

Sao Paulo's 1110 of October 7, 1969; Sao Paulo's A-61;
Sao Paulo's 490 and 699

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SUMMARY: A brother of one of the Dominican priests detained by the military in November 1969 visited the Consulate General to report that copies of USIS brochures which he used in teaching English had been confiscated as "subversive". He also related the brutal ordeal which his brother had undergone shortly after his arrest, reported some aspects of prison life and commented on the cases of "Frei Tito", several recently recanting VPR members, and the "Esquadrao da Morte".

Copies of USIS Brochures Confiscated

Mr. Rod ROMANO (protect source), an employee in the industrial relations section of the Chrysler Corporation of Brazil, visited the Consulate General on July 29 to report that mimeographed copies which he had made of USIS brochures dealing with Martin Luther King had been seized the previous day during a visit to his brother, "Frei Roberto" ROMANO da Silva, presently detained in the Tiradentes Prison in São Paulo. Mr. Romano uses USIS material for English classes which he gives to employees of the Chrysler Corporation.

To fill the long, empty hours of confinement, "Frei Roberto" and other prisoners are studying English under Mr. Romano, who, lacking a sufficient number of the USIS brochures, had made copies for use by the prisoners. The fact that material dealing with Martin Luther King was in the hands of the prisoners was brought to the attention of the

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POL:PeterJdeVos:vr
in Substance: POL-I, Mr. Holliwell
USIS-Mr. Fisher, USIS-Mr. Petersen

Declassified Authority: 43265
By: Amanda Weimer Date:
05-14-2015

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prison Director, who promptly ordered its seizure, labelled the brochures "subversive" and threatened to turn them over to the DEOPS (the civilian political police).

Mr. Romano said he wished only to bring this incident to the attention of the Consulate General and emphasized that under no circumstances did he wish the Consulate General to initiate a protest or take any other action; he thus hoped that the matter would pass quietly. To do otherwise, he feared, would only cause trouble for his brother. As it appeared that this was probably an isolated incident, it was agreed that no action would be taken at this time regarding the seizure of the material.

Torture of "Frei Roberto"

Mr. Romano said that his brother, "Frei Roberto", had been detained by the Army on November 4, 1969 (date of the death of Carlos MARIGHELLA), while travelling to Rio at the behest of the Prior of the Dominican Seminary located in the Perdizes section of São Paulo. His mission had been to offer reassurance to the families of two other Dominican friars previously arrested at the seminary (São Paulo 1110). Apparently the telephones had been tapped and he was arrested as he arrived in Rio de Janeiro. "Frei Roberto" was accused of being a subversive sympathizer and of assisting at least one terrorist activist to flee Brazil. During his six days in custody in Rio he was treated well.

According to Mr. Romano, his brother was subsequently transferred to São Paulo where he was viciously tortured by DEOPS personnel who wished him to confess to the alleged crimes and to furnish derogatory information on other Dominicans. However, "Frei Roberto" proclaimed his innocence and refused to incriminate his colleagues. Some of the tortures said to have been used are the pau de arara, submerging the prisoner's head in water until he was on the brink of suffocation, winding an electrical wire about the genitals and applying shocks, and beating the victim with heavy sticks while wrapped in a blanket.

Neither the Dominican Seminary nor the Romano family was able to ascertain "Frei Roberto's" whereabouts or what had happened to him. Only 43 days after "Frei Roberto's" disappearance was the Prior notified

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that he could be found in the Tiradentes Prison. Mr. Romano said that he went immediately to visit his brother; he found him badly bruised, his lips split and his nose distorted. "Frei Roberto" has gradually recuperated his health; since his arrival at Tiradentes he has been subjected to no further physical torture, although other types of harassment, such as oral death threats, are frequent.

Conditions in Tiradentes Prison

Mr. Romano described conditions in the Tiradentes Prison as deplorable. The families of prisoners are trying to provide relief as best they can. After an intensive background check by the authorities, families and other concerned persons may visit the prisoners on a regular basis. However, visitors are occasionally subjected to thorough personal searches, including an examination of body orifices. Prisoners may be taken clothing, blankets, food, etc., but everything is subjected to close scrutiny. The Dominican Seminary furnishes "political" prisoners (who are lodged separately from those jailed on criminal charges) with special foodstuffs and other items which improve their personal comfort. Gifts of money, which the prisoners formerly pooled for distribution to the families of the poorest, are now forbidden since prison officials contend that the money was diverted to finance the terrorists.

Mr. Romano said that "Frei Roberto" shares a cell with 78 other prisoners, most of whom have university degrees. This cell was designed for 25 persons. Complaints about physical discomfort have been stifled by the authorities' threat to cut off the assistance brought the prisoners from the outside. Prisoners who have been detained for longer periods sleep on the floor in order to give the beds to new arrivals, many of whom are suffering from the physical punishment meted out by DEOPS and military interrogators. Mr. Romano estimates that there are some 350-400 political prisoners in the Tiradentes Prison, only some of whom his brother has described to him as "hardened terrorists".

"Frei Tito" Case

In response to a question, Mr. Romano said he knew of the "Frei Tito" case and recounted it as told to him by his brother. His account coincided closely with the article published in the July 14 issue of Look Magazine.

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Mr. Romano said that while he was aware of the existence of the Look article, he had not read it himself. In addition to relating the atrocities perpetrated on "Frei Tito", Mr. Romano said that a civilian judge (possible the Dr. Nelson GUIMARAES mentioned in the Look article) had attempted to intervene on behalf of "Frei Tito" and the other Dominicans, but he had been summoned and personally threatened by Second Army Commander General CANAVARRO Pereira with the same tortures if he pursued the issue. (It is interesting to note, incidentally, that Judge Nelson Guimaraes signed a court order on July 7 for the release of twenty-six prisoners [redacted]. Mr. Romano mentioned that his brother apparently had convinced the judicial authorities of his innocence and was to be released. However, the military had intervened and insisted that the Dominicans (eight are believed being held in the Tiradentes Prison) "will rot in prison" as long as terrorism persists.)

Discredits Claims of ex-Terrorists and Comments on Death Squad Victims

Mr. Romano stated that his brother had informed him several weeks beforehand that five VPR prisoners would make a public recantation in exchange for preferential treatment at the hands of the authorities (São Paulo's 490). Furthermore, he alleged that both Massafumi YOSHINAGA and Celso LUNGARETTI (A-61) had been captured and imprisoned, contrary to the official version that they had left the terrorist movement and surrendered on their own accord. Finally, Mr. Romano said that four of the victims of the "Esquadrao da Morte" (Death Squad) killed on July 18 (São Paulo's 689 NOTAL) were criminal prisoners taken directly from their cells at the Tiradentes Prison and summarily executed by the police. In conclusion he stated that the prison grapevine was unusually accurate and that many of the prisoners in the Tiradentes were terrified that the "Esquadrao" killings would continue, not only against "criminal elements" but against the "political prisoners" as well.

LAMBERT *FLS*

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